Chance and Probability
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Chance and Probability

by babyblueglasses

Summary

Tony has come to terms with Loki not liking him, but it still stings to find out that Loki likes someone else.

If Tony got a second chance, he's certain that he could win Loki's heart.

Chapter 1

Fandral rose from the table, holding a goblet in one hand and a spoon in the other. He nodded his head meaningfully to Hogun beside him. After a moment of uncertainty and Fandral raising an eyebrow, Hogun stood with a smile he couldn't manage to hide.

Tony knew what it was, grinning as Fandral clinked his spoon against the glass and their table of friends fell silent.

Finally.

They hadn't been half as secretive about it as they'd thought they were being, which wasn't really a surprise with Fandral, but Hogun could've done better. Tony held back a laugh. He was happy for them.

"I have a quick announcement to make," Fandral said with his ever charming smile. "Hogun and I have decided to make our courtship official. We are now boyfriend and boyfriend."

"They don't look very surprised," Hogun said.

"Of course we don't!" Sif exclaimed, smiling. "I walked past you two making out in the stables last week."

"Even I have noticed what direction things were headed," Thor chimed in.

"Here's to you two finally making it official," Volstagg said, raising a glass. Everyone began clinking their glasses together and drinking, the noise at their happy table doubling in the great hall as the couple sat back down.

Tony turned to Loki beside him. "Finally, huh?" He said, smiling. Loki was staring straight ahead, stiff.

"Yes," Loki said smoothly, hurrying to take a drink from his glass. Tony's heart sank a little deeper into his chest.

Loki wasn't into him. Tony knew that. Loki's gaze had never lingered on him too long. He'd always been impeccably considerate towards Tony.

Tony knew, and yet he still carried a soft spot in his chest every time he'd banter with Loki or they studied together. They had good chemistry, and Loki was remarkably handsome.

Still, Tony understood that Loki wasn't into him, and he'd accepted it. He just hadn't expected for Loki to be into Fandral.

Tony knew him well enough to recognize the cold daggers pointed in Fandral's direction, the hurt in Loki's eyes.

"Well," Volstagg said, pointing the conversation in Tony's direction. "It appears that you and Loki are the only ones left at this table not in an official courtship now."

"Hey," Tony instantly said, used to his teasing. "Pepper and I split up two years ago. I told you, after a century, it's hard to get your game back on."

"You know," Fandral said, propping his chin in his hand. "If you wish for me to set you up with

someone, all you need do is ask. The court is so curious about you after your centuries on Midgard."

Tony scoffed. He didn't think the court particularly cared, and he'd only managed to befriend Thor and his friends upon returning because Thor shared his interest for Midgard. "They believe Midgard's all farming and trekking. They do not know it as I do now."

"That's exactly why you must tell them of it," Fandral answered.

Loki was the only person that was interested in more than five minutes of Tony talking about Midgard. And really, it was probably because he was just too polite to tell Tony to shut up.

"Bore them, you mean," Tony said lightheartedly, reaching for a bread roll.

Fandral shrugged. "If I can't convince you, then Prince Loki, perhaps I can set you up with someone? How about Lady Astrid? I hear she recently broke up with her lover."

"I have no need for your assistance," Loki said, his tone like a pointed blade. Thor shot a look towards Fandral that had him soar towards talking about their next hunt. Loki got up from the table without a word a few minutes later.

Sif watched him go before turning to Fandral. "Now you've gone and stepped in it," she said. "Five hundred years and you're still offering to set him up with someone. You know it pisses him off."

"He wasn't pissed," Hogun said. "He is just like that. He is fine."

"I've never heard rumors of him courting anyone on Asgard," Volstagg said. "Though I'm sure if we were to ask around Vanaheim, we would know. He spent so long there." Volstagg took a drink. "Or perhaps he's never courted any at all."

"I'm sure he has," Fandral said. "He simply likes keeping his secrets. Don't you think so, Thor?"

"He has never divulged them to me," Thor said, hints of bitter rejection in his voice.

Sif patted his arm. "I'm sure if he was going to kiss and tell to anyone, he'd tell you. He's just private. You know that. I'm sure he had a girlfriend or a boyfriend on Vanaheim. Why else would he have studied there on and off for centuries?" She shot Fandral a dirty look for bringing it up again. "Do you think they'll bring caramel pudding once the main meal is over?"

"I hope it's cherry tart," Hogun said.

Tony looked out across the hall, hoping to spot Loki, but he was gone. Loki never missed dessert. Tony was sure he'd be back. He just hoped that Loki wasn't crying and heartbroken over Fandral somewhere.

Loki did show back up for dessert. He was calm on the surface, but prickly and short when Tony tried talking to him. When the evening meal ended and the hall began to empty out, Tony hurried to catch up with Loki.

He was kicking himself for it, but he just couldn't stand letting Loki stew over it. He wanted to fix it for Loki. He struggled to let things be if he could do something.

"Hey, Loki," Tony said. "I've got something in my lab I'd really like to show you tonight. Would

you mind swinging by with me really quickly? I could use your opinion."

Loki had been staring down at the ground as he walked. He wavered for a moment. "I don't see why not," he decided. "What is it?"

"It's a line of Jarvis's coding. I want him to be immune to verbal spells, and I was hoping you could see if you could find some loopholes." It was true. Tony had worked that into Jarv's programming since moving back to Asgard, but he was entirely sure that Loki wouldn't find a loophole.

Loki nodded. "I wouldn't mind taking a look at it. There are a good number of mages that could compromise your security system with well phrased spells."

Tony got him talking about spell work, and by the time they'd reached Tony's home, Loki was less tense than dinner. "So, uh, Jarvis," Tony said. Loki made himself at home on Tony's couch as he had many times before. "I'd like Loki to try some verbal spells to see if he can magically break past your defenses. Are you up for a verbal sparring match, buddy?"

"Considering that my greatest entertainment today has been watching you and Dummy put out a fire, nothing would please me more."

"Hey, you're making me look bad," Tony complained. "And it was a small one," Tony said, smiling at Loki. "A very small one."

Loki just shook his head a little, exasperated. Normally he'd snark back. "I'm going to get some drinks," Tony said. "I'll be right back."

When Tony returned with a tray with beers and a cheese platter, Loki was talking to Jarvis, trying to break past his defenses. He took the beer Tony offered. Tony watched for a while, feeling smug about how well coded Jarvis was.

Eventually, Loki turned to Tony.

"I would say he's well-equipped, though he has a vulnerability for some subjunctive phrases that you could look into."

"Huh," Tony said. So he had missed something. He smiled a little, impressed. "Thanks for finding that."

Loki took a long sip from his beer, his gaze distant again.

"Hey," Tony said, his voice dropping down a little lower, softer. "About tonight. I know you and Fandral like to flirt, and I know it sucks to see someone you like with somebody else. I just wanted to let you know I'm here if you want to talk about it."

Loki blinked in surprise. With an incredulous expression he answered, "I don't like Fandral that way." It was so blunt that Tony knew it couldn't be a lie. "I like trading insults with him because it entertains me. I wouldn't consider it flirting. He flirts with everything that moves." Loki finished the rest of his beer in one sip.

Tony hadn't been prepared for that response. The cold condensation from the beer in his hands dripped along his fingers. Loki grabbed another beer, twisting off the lid and taking a drink.

The beers were different form what Tony'd grown accustomed to on Midgard. The bottles were broader, with artsy curves in the glasses and a label only on the lid. They also held more than a

Midgardian bottle.

“Then—why are you upset?” Tony asked.

Loki picked at a piece of cheese. “I’m fine. I don’t care that Fandral and Hogun are courting. We all knew it was headed in that direction.”

Annoyance flickered through Tony. “Don’t tell me you’re not upset. I can see it as plain as day.”

Loki’s shoulders hunched inward on reflex, then he sat up taller. “You don’t need to worry about it, Tony. It’s nothing that concerns you.”

Tony huffed, setting his beer down. He didn’t know why he’d invited Loki over. He should’ve just left him alone.

“What?” Loki asked, a hint of worry creeping into his voice.

“I mean, obviously something’s wrong, but you don’t have to tell me what it is.” Tony grabbed a small handful of cheese.

Loki drew in a rather loud breath through his nose, annoyed. He pressed his lips together. “When I say there is nothing that can be done, I mean it.” Loki buried himself in his drink then, pointedly looking elsewhere.

That made no sense. Maybe Tony was wrong to assume that it was about Fandral. “You like Hogun?”

“No!” Loki rolled his eyes. “I’m *jealous* of them,” he exclaimed, irritation coloring his words and making Tony feel a little dumb. “Please don’t tell anyone I said that,” Loki said with a mix of self-loathing and warning.

“Loki,” Tony said. “That’s—I totally get it, okay? I mean, we got singled out for being the only single people at the table, didn’t mean to make that pun there—”

Tony was still working on wiggling out the knife that had struck his chest at the thought he and Loki could just be a couple and solve that.

“—It’s, I mean, I think that’s normal. I’m a little jealous too. Like I know Pepper and I wouldn’t work out if we got back together, we did try that and got a few more years out before we fell apart again. But, I mean, I still miss her sometimes. I miss being a part of a relationship.”

“It’s not the same thing at all,” Loki said, his cheeks starting to show a flush from the beer he was so intent on downing.

The callous answer annoyed Tony.

Loki plucked a few grapes from the platter.

Loki wasn’t going to volunteer more, and Tony wanted to know.

Tony agreed with Volstagg that Loki had lovers on Vanaheim. He was an attractive guy, and smart. Vanaheim didn’t have the same prejudices towards magic that Asgard had. Loki was probably incredibly popular there.

Or well, Fandral and Hogun didn’t have families that would object to them dating, but it was hard to imagine the king approving of Loki dating anyone but another realm’s princess. And Vanaheim

didn't have a princess at the moment.

"Would your father disapprove of you dating another male?" Tony guessed, trying to be tactful about it.

Loki leaned his arm against the couch, setting the side of his head against his hand. "At this point, he may be thrilled that I would be dating anyone." Loki's unhappiness seemed to shift outward in the same breath. "It was one thing when everyone was still single. When Thor started dating Sif, it wasn't exactly a surprise. But then Volstagg, of all people, with his crude mannerisms and his pigheadedness, started courting that dainty flower of a lady, and then Fandral and Hogun both suddenly became a thing after that trip—"

Loki glanced at Tony, then right away. "Though you broke up with Pepper, you were courting someone. All of you can find someone."

Tony tilted his head a little. "Loki," he said, watching as Loki finished off his beer and reached for another. "If you wished to be courting someone, why don't you just ask someone? You're a prince —" Loki's bitter laugh stopped him short.

Tony's resolve only grew. "Seriously," Tony said. "There are people that like you, you know—"

"—That is not the problem," Loki said. Tony'd never seen Loki like this. He'd never seen him drop the pretenses and start wallowing in unhappiness. Sure, Tony had sensed when it was there, but Loki usually hid it away. "The problem lies with me."

"What do you mean?"

The bridge of Loki's nose and his cheeks were turning a dark pink. He ran a hand through his hair. "I feel no attraction to anyone, and no willingness to try regardless. I doubt I—" He glanced down at his beer. "I doubt I *could* love someone, or that they would love me. The odds are not in my favor."

Tony's heart splintered. "Loki—"

"—I don't need your pity, Tony. You asked. Surely even before your return you knew of my reputation on Asgard. Thor is our realm's beloved prince. I am known only for my tricks for I am a nuisance."

"Ok, I think you've had a little too much beer, because that is just not true—"

"—I would know it were true even if I were perfectly sober," Loki argued. "There is cause as to why I am alone." Loki rubbed his nose. "And it's fine. Them becoming official just brought it back up. I'll be fine tomorrow. I don't *need* someone."

Tony regretted bringing the alcohol out. He'd sort of meant it just as being a host, but he had hoped Loki would loosen up and talk a little. Now he felt guilty, like he'd done something wrong.

Tony took a sip from his beer, like that would somehow make it better.

"But you're jealous of Fandral and Hogun," Tony said.

"Of course I am. Not only do their families and all of Asgard embrace them, but they have someone else that cares for them."

"Yeah but what I mean is that means you still *want* to be with someone, right?"

Loki sighed, then slowly nodded.

“So why don’t you…try to find someone?”

Loki leaned off his hand, irritated. “As if it’s that easy.” He picked at a thread on his tunic. “It would be easy if I preferred men. There are plenty of men to choose from. It would be even easier if I cared for women, as the odds are even greater.

“But honestly, Tony. Who would ever try with me, knowing my lack of desire? Unless they were like me? Do you truly know how thin that chance is, or are you content to parade your feel good try advice?” Loki asked, voice caustic. “Who would ever try?”

“I would,” Tony said, surprising himself even as he said it. “I mean,” he said, looking down at his hands. “If you were interested.”

Loki stared at him in shock, Tony’s heart beginning to pound.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"What?" Loki asked, then hiccuped, hiding his mouth with his hand.

"I mean, I've always thought you were attractive," Tony said. He hoped his cheeks weren't turning red. They felt warm. "We—"

"—Oh," Loki interrupted. "You think I'm attractive." He started to stand, reaching for the arm of the couch for balance.

Tony stayed where he was, though he squeezed his knee from nerves. He hadn't been planning to tell Loki just now, and suddenly he was desperate for Loki to validate his confession.

But Loki was squinting at him, his gaze critical even as he was drunk. "I am not some experiment for you to play at, to see if you can just fuck the interest into me."

That jabbed right into Tony's heart. "That's *not* what I said."

Loki scowled at him.

"It's not!" Tony argued. "I was just saying that I think you're attractive and that—"

"—You think everyone's attractive! How wonderfully fortunate for you! You can gladly take your pick of anyone, so why me? I don't need your pity—"

"—It's not pity!"

Tony wasn't sure how they'd gotten to yelling. They'd never yelled at each other before. His head was spinning.

"Don't lie to me!"

"Is it that hard to believe I'd like you!?" Tony demanded, folding his arms over his chest and drawing them in close.

"Yes!" Loki stared at Tony, wide eyed and furious. Tony was stunned for a moment. He didn't know what to say to that. Loki had no problem filling in the silence. "How could you ever be content with *me* when you've slept with half the court—"

"—*What* did you just say?" Tony demanded, his tone so sharp and serious that Loki was momentarily surprised into silence. "You are not going to talk like that about me in my house."

Loki stared at him for a moment, vulnerable and uncertain where he'd been furious moments before. And then, like a door being slammed, that look was gone. "Very well," Loki said, starting for the exit.

Tony let him walk to the door without a word, his anger purring happily in his chest with vindication, until Loki got closer to leaving. Then fear struck. "Loki, wait—"

"—I never should have told you," Loki said, grasping the door handle. "And you would be wise not to tell anyone else." He swung open the door. It might've looked dramatic as he left, the wind

catching his hair, but he stumbled on the steps before slamming the door.

Tony ran a hand through his hair. He knew Loki could safely navigate back on his own, but he still ran to the door. He hesitated at the handle.

No. He couldn't go after him.

His heart couldn't take more of Loki's rejection.

Tony went straight up the stairs and threw himself into bed, furious at Loki for what he'd said, and furious at himself for his terrible timing.

At lunch the next day, Tony was already sitting at the table with everyone when Loki arrived. Loki hadn't shown up for breakfast. Tony's chest grew tight as he approached, but Loki didn't take the open seat next to him like normal. He went as far as possible to the other end of the table, making Thor scoot down to make room for him.

Everyone noticed. Of course they did. Suddenly there were five pairs of eyes on him, then Loki.

Tony took a bite out of his meat pie, determined to be as oblivious to Loki as Loki was being to him.

Fandral started talking about a play they were going to see that night, sparing the table from the tension. Loki only acknowledged Thor, commenting on the food.

It was the first meal Tony could remember since his early days back on Asgard that he didn't speak to Loki once.

Tony wasn't surprised when Fandral hurried to catch up with him, Hogun quickly joining. "What happened between you two?"

Tony turned so that they could walk out into one of the palace gardens instead. "I'm pissed at him," Tony said.

Hogun grinned. "That's not an unusual thing to say around here."

"True," Fandral said. "But it is the first time Tony's said it."

Tony stopped beside a giant fir tree. There were dainty white flowers planted around it. He sighed, rubbing his temple. "Seriously. I'm actually—really angry with him."

"Well, don't leave us in suspense," Fandral prompted. "What happened?"

Tony hadn't been able to stop thinking about it. "He shamed me, saying I've slept with half the court. It's none of his fucking business what I do. He doesn't have a right to be so judgmental about it."

Fandral relaxed, leaning against a stone balcony in front of some shrubs. "He does tend to strike at whatever he thinks will sting most when he is angry. I'm assuming you had an argument?"

"Yeah," Tony said, grinding a bit of gravel beneath his boot. "But he started it."

Hogun leaned against the stone balcony beside Fandral. “How?”

Tony didn’t want to tell them everything. Not because Loki had vaguely threatened him about it, but because he actually fucking respected that Loki didn’t want people to know, so the threat just pissed him off more.

“I mean—” Tony scratched at his beard. “I asked him about something he didn’t want to talk about.”

“Ah,” Fandral said. “That never goes well.” Hogun breathed out a laugh, nodding. “If he doesn’t want you to know about something, he’ll never tell you. It’s impossible to slip something out of him.”

That felt worse. Not only had Loki told him then, but Loki had immediately regretted it.

Hogun brushed his hair back over his shoulder. “What did you ask about?”

“I don’t really want to say,” Tony answered. Fandral and Hogun exchanged a look.

After a moment of thought, Fandral asked, “Are you going to forgive him?”

“I—” It was more than just what Loki had said. He’d also rejected Tony. “I don’t know.”

“You are easily his closest friend here,” Hogun said. “I’m sure he’ll relent sooner rather than later.”

“That is very true,” Fandral agreed. “He has been friendlier since you came around. You’re the only one that shares his interests.”

“Yes. None of us want to spend the afternoon in the library,” Hogun said.

“I don’t know,” Tony said, looking away. “He’s pissed at me too.”

“We’ve all pissed him off at one time or another,” Fandral reassured him. “See how he is after the play tonight. He may have calmed down by then.” Tony shrugged. “It’s the Water Lily Troupe. They’re not to be missed.”

“People still talk about their show from the summer festival that was twenty years ago,” Hogun said.

“I’ll be there,” Tony said. “I’ll go. It’s not like I’ll have my shop open tonight. Everyone’s going to be there.”

“Speaking of,” Fandral said. “I was planning to drop by later today. I have a few weapons that I was hoping you could fix.” “Sure. I can take a look at them.”

“Great. We’ll see you later today then,” Fandral said, taking Hogun’s hand. Tony waved them goodbye, feeling a pang of jealousy as he watched them walk away. He rolled his eyes at himself. He was being ridiculous.

Tony went to the play. It was held on a stage in a grand field, and everyone had brought blankets and cushions to sit on. The stage was dimly lit, allowing time for everyone to get settled in the audience. Tony joined Fandral and their friends. Loki wasn’t with them. He was far away, seated beside his mother and smiling as he talked to her.

Annoyed, Tony turned towards the stage.

He heard a rustling beside him. A group of women were setting up a picnic blanket. Dagny sat beside him, giving Tony a polite smile as she recognized him. They'd slept together a few times, but there wasn't any serious chemistry between them.

"Everyone's been saying I shouldn't miss this," Tony said.

"Is it your first time seeing them?" Dagny asked. Tony nodded. "Oh, you're going to love them. They're really, really good. I'll tell you who all the actors are when they get on stage."

They quietly talked throughout the play. Everyone was right. The theater troupe was very good. They used magic to brilliant effect too, and Tony couldn't help but wonder what Loki thought of it. He pushed that thought away.

Tony held Dagny's hand as they left with the crowd, feeling a little happier than he had at the beginning of the evening.

Dagny left his place in the morning, and Tony knew without a doubt that he wouldn't see her again until one of them felt like another hookup. It had been pleasant. It always was, but Tony was already forgetting about it as he went about opening his shop.

* * *

Tony stayed at his shop for lunch, and only joined Thor and his friends for the evening meal. Loki wasn't there. Tony didn't bring it up, and neither did anyone else.

* * *

At the next meal, Thor and Loki arrived late. It was obvious that they'd been arguing. Watching Loki work out where he could sit so that he was still at their table, but as far away from both Tony and Thor as possible, would've been funny if it hadn't made Tony's heart ache so much.

He missed Loki, and he was still angry. He'd had no one to really talk to the last few days, no one who would tease him back or seem interested in some scientific tangent.

The second that the meal was over, Loki was gone. Volstagg asked Thor what their fight had been about, but he wouldn't say.

It wasn't exactly unusual to see them arguing, but Tony didn't miss the way Thor's gaze had darted to him when asked.

* * *

Another day passed, and Tony couldn't stop replaying their argument in his head, thinking of all the things that he wished he would have said. The things he should have asked. He had questions now, even if he doubted that Loki would answer them.

Tony caught Loki staring at him from across the table at dinner, but the moment their eyes met his gaze turned steely and he broke contact. He didn't look at Tony for the rest of the meal.

* * *

"I was able to clean these up," Tony said, setting down a sword and a set of daggers. "But I'd recommend getting a new staff. The one you've got isn't going to have the same integrity unless I

basically remake it."

"I was afraid you were going to say that," Fandral sighed. "I don't suppose you take custom orders?"

"Of course I do," Tony said, setting one hand on his hip. "Don't insult me."

Fandral laughed. "Then I'll order one another day," he said, setting his payment down and carefully taking the sword and daggers back. Fandral paused, glancing around the empty shop. "Has Loki spoken to you yet?"

Tony should've known the conversation was coming. He toyed with one of the pens on the shop counter. "No. Why? Something I should know about Horns?"

Fandral leaned against the counter, acting nonchalant as he kept his gaze on the door. "Not particularly." He glanced back at Tony. "But *you* look unhappy lately."

"I mean yeah," Tony said. "I'm not hanging out with him anymore." Tony reached for one of the polishing rags, just to have something to twist in his hands. "It was an ugly argument."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Tony shook his head. "Not really."

"Then believe me when I say I think he will come around. His anger never lasts forever. Thor can tell you that."

Tony pulled the rag taut, then tossed it back on the counter. "It's a little different to forgive your brother than some guy you're friends with."

Fandral shrugged. The front doorbell rang as a customer walked in. "Well," Fandral said. "I wish you the best of luck. You know where I am if you want to talk."

"I appreciate that."

"Yes, well, we're all rather fond of you. We don't want to see you decide to head back to Midgard just because of one of our princes giving you a hard time."

Tony chuckled. "I don't plan on going back any time soon. It's kind of nice to be back here."

Fandral gave him a genuine smile then and stepped aside for the customer that was waiting for Tony.

Fandral's visit made Tony feel better that afternoon, but as he laid in bed that night thinking about what he'd said, he knew in his gut that Fandral was wrong. Loki wouldn't come around and talk to him. Loki just wasn't the kind of person to take the risk of that first step.

Loki would be standoffish if Tony tried to talk to him, and Tony knew they'd argue again. He knew, but he thought now it would be worth it.

Loki needed to listen to what Tony had wanted to say. Tony needed him to understand. And Tony did miss him, regardless of Loki rejecting him.

Tony knew what he had to do, even as dread pooled in his stomach.

* * *

Tony waited until the end of the evening meal the next day. He knew it was the day that Loki usually went to the library to study for the evening, so he'd be free to talk. Tony kept his distance, planning to meet Loki in the library.

Tony rounded the corner of the hall towards the library doors, only to stumble backwards as Loki spun towards him. "Why are you following me?" He hissed, walking forwards and forcing Tony to take several steps back until he was cornered against the wall.

"I was going to say we need to talk," Tony said, his voice flinty. "Obviously."

"Talk of what?"

Tony rolled his eyes. "Don't play dumb. You owe me a conversation, and we can either have it out here in the hallway, or one of the library meeting rooms."

"I don't owe you anything," Loki said, taking a step back and folding his arms.

"So it's totally fine then that everyone else at our table feels the tension every day?"

Loki huffed. "Fine," he growled. "But we will not speak in the library study rooms. We will go to my chambers where there aren't prying ears."

"Lead the way," Tony said sarcastically, waving his arm.

"So glad we're doing this," Loki sniped, turning away and setting a brisk pace towards his rooms.

As they walked, Tony's heart was pounding. Loki kept his gaze perfectly ahead. He was outpacing Tony on purpose, but that only gave Tony the opportunity to take a closer look at him than he had the past few days.

Loki was wearing his favorite tunic, a casual but elegant design that Tony had seen on him often. His hair was slicked back and straight. It was too perfectly done, so Tony knew it was only a glamor hiding a mess of half formed curls beneath. Tony rubbed his forehead as he felt his angry resolve starting to crack.

He still liked Loki. Of course he did. He fucking missed him.

When they made it to Loki's rooms, Loki stepped aside to let Tony in, and it was the first time he noticed the bags underneath Loki's eyes.

The main hall of Loki's rooms smelled sterile, with the sharp scent of the cleaning solutions the palace was cleaned with. All of the doors to the individual rooms were shut.

Loki was watching him beside the doorframe, weary. Tony was certain he'd put a silencing spell on the door.

Tony knew the best thing was just to get it over with. "I'm going to say something," Tony said, trying to remember what he'd rehearsed in his head. "And I want you to listen until I'm done without saying anything."

Loki said nothing, but Tony couldn't tell what he was thinking. "Okay?" Tony asked.

"Fine."

“When I said try, that’s exactly what I meant. Try and have a relationship. Not let’s try and have sex and see if you like it. And I didn’t say any of it out of pity.” Just saying that made Tony lighter.

Loki looked like he wanted to fade away into the black lacquer of the door, or be anywhere else in the world but having the conversation they were having. “Alright.”

Tony had expected brimstone. He’d expected a fight, not a reluctant alright. Loki wouldn’t even look at him. Then it hit like a sack of bricks. Loki was embarrassed. “I would have given it a shot,” Tony said, trying to convey that he’d been sincere.

Loki’s eyebrow twitched. He still wouldn’t look at Tony. “It would never work,” Loki said. “I wasn’t wrong when I said you prefer the company of many,” he said, his voice creeping much closer to anger. “You left with Dagny the other night. You need something that I couldn’t begin to give you.”

Tony was both surprised that Loki had noticed, and a little flattered that Loki had been watching him that closely. “You don’t know that,” Tony said. “You don’t know that at all.”

“Don’t I?” Fire was in Loki’s eyes now. “People feel like their relationships are falling apart when they don’t have sex often enough. And now you want me to believe that you’d be satisfied with my complete lack of desire?”

“Okay,” Tony said, his own anger welling up. “You *really* are assuming things about me, and I don’t like the way you look down on me for sleeping with a bunch of people—”

“—I don’t—”

“—Yeah, you kind of do,” Tony cut him off. “You’re telling me who you think I am and making all these assumptions, and you’re not listening to me at all.” Loki winced. “It is absolutely not your business to judge me like that. Also, it pissed me off that you sort of threatened me not to tell anyone what you told me, not just because it was shitty in general to threaten, but because when have I ever been a bad friend to make you think I’d go around telling people about something you didn't want them to know? They don’t even know why we’re fighting.”

Loki licked his lips. Whatever he wanted to say, he couldn’t bring himself to say it, so Tony continued. “I like you. I like *you*, Loki. I would’ve liked to date you and see where it goes, sex or not. I didn’t say any of it because you were some experiment to me or whatever else you thought. I would’ve liked to see what us courting would’ve been like. And it’s fine that you don’t. We can still be friends. It’s fine that you don’t like me like that.”

All of the anger spilled out in Tony’s words, sounding so much like a lecture to his own ears that he would’ve recoiled if it hadn’t been such a load off his shoulders. He’d hated every assumption that Loki had made.

Loki was watching him now, looking a little like he wanted to melt into the floor again, and a little frightened. “That’s—” Loki licked his lips. “Not what I said.”

“What wasn’t?”

“I never said—” Loki glanced away and then back again. “That I don’t like you like that.”

Tony’s head began to spin. “Oh.”

Chapter End Notes

You didn't think the first confession would go that easily, did you? ;)

Chapter 3

“I’ve thought about us courting,” Loki said softly. “I *like* you. But when I’ve thought about it—” Loki held one arm over his chest, worrying his thumb against his bicep. “I always come back to that we’re better off as friends.”

“Why?”

Loki gave him a bitter stare.

“I’m serious,” Tony said. “If we like each other, then what’s the problem?”

“The problem,” Loki said, his voice jumping from the somberness it held just moments ago. “Is that you’ll grow bored of me and realize I can’t offer you everything you want, and then I’ll have lost my best friend.” Loki huffed, then smiled, his bottom lip quivering. “If we can even recover from this,” he said harshly.

Tony stared at him.

Loki dropped his arm from his chest. He grabbed the hem of his tunic instead, then let go. “Tony,” he said plaintively.

“No,” Tony said. He could sense where Loki was headed, and he didn’t like it. “Look. Give me a chance. Let me take you out on one date, and if it doesn’t work out, we just go back to being friends. And we can. We both made it this long holding onto romantic feelings. If it doesn’t work, we’ll move on and be friends again.”

Loki’s unspoken skepticism flustered Tony.

“Ok. I see I’m not getting anywhere telling you it’s fine, so let’s talk about it instead. We could work on the sex part. Are you open to trying anything?”

Loki’s shoulders jumped in a tense shrug. “I don’t know.”

“Ok. So we can talk about trying things. And you can say no to things if you don’t want to try them or don’t like them. And if you don’t want to try or hate everything, then that’s okay too. We’ll work out something, Loki. But we won’t know if we don’t even try.”

Loki frowned, staring past Tony.

Tony couldn’t bear to wait while Loki thought it over. “It’s killing me that you like me but you don’t want to give us a chance to court because you’ve already decided how it ends.”

Loki opened his mouth, then paused. He was cornered and uncertain. Tony had never seen him so anguished. Closing his mouth, he shut his eyes, jaw tensing. When his dark green eyes set on Tony, they were an unsettling mixture of hopelessness and determination.

“One date,” Loki said slowly. “And I don’t want you to tell anyone,” he said more forcefully. “The last thing I want is for the entire realm’s eyes to be on us as their latest source of entertainment.”

Tony didn’t feel elated like he thought he should. “I’m willing to keep the first date on the down low,” he said, thinking it over. “But you don’t…seem excited.”

“Of course I don’t, Tony.” Loki stared at him, imploring him to understand. “I’m willing to give

you a chance, but I don't—I don't think it will work." He folded his arms around his chest, uncomfortable.

They weren't going to be able to talk this out. Tony told himself he'd just have to show Loki that it could work by actually trying it. "Ok," Tony said. "Ok. Where—where should we go for our first date? I think we should—go somewhere new."

"Svartalfheim." It wasn't at all what Tony had expected him to say, but he had to admit that the thought had him excited. He'd rarely gotten to visit. "There will be less gossip about us there, and it will be easy for me to get us passage to visit. We can tell everyone that I—offered it as a concession after our fighting."

Tony tried to push down his excitement. He was still uneasy, despite how much he liked Svartalfheim. "Okay," Tony said. "But you know they're going to ask what the fight was about." Loki glanced at him. "We can say it was me arguing with you on a magical theory about metals in my forge."

Loki huffed. It was boring enough to everyone else that they'd believe it. And their friends had seen them argue about theories in magic and science, even if they'd never gotten into a true fight about it. "Alright."

Tony enjoyed the sensation of relief. Loki stepped back from the door expectantly. Tony was being dismissed.

"Lo," Tony said. The fight hadn't been easy on him, and looking at Loki up close, Tony knew it hadn't been easy on Loki either. "I'm glad we're not fighting."

Loki nodded. "Yes," he said, still cautious. Tony figured he'd be guarded until their date went well. Which it would. Tony was determined that it would.

"Can I hug you?" Tony asked, stepping closer. The request surprised Loki. He stared at Tony for a moment before slowly nodding. Relieved, Tony swept him into a hug, holding him tight against his chest.

He'd always wanted to hold Loki like this. Sure, he'd bumped Loki's arm a few times or given him a high five in the lab, but Loki wasn't one to initiate touch. Tony had never gotten to hug him.

Tony was expecting Loki to just humor him. He wasn't at all prepared for the way that the tension slowly dropped from Loki, until he was melting into Tony, seemingly unaware of the way he was leaning his weight into Tony like a moth seeking the light. A hesitant arm wrapped around Tony's shoulder, returning the hug while the other hung limply, not holding him.

It reminded Tony of the way that Thor embraced everyone after a battle, hugging them from the side in camaraderie.

Loki let out a faint sound, syrupy with emotion. Tony didn't think Loki realized that he had. Tony hid his smile against Loki's chest.

He was reluctant to let go, but when he did, Loki seemed a little dazed.

Loki quickly hid that though, awkwardly looking down.

Belatedly, Tony wondered how often anyone embraced him. Before the thought could ache any further, Loki spoke. "Perhaps we could go in two days' time?" He brushed his hair back. "I don't wish to delay it and fret over it, if that is alright by you. I know your shop—"

“—I can make it work,” Tony said. “And I agree. I’m going to have a hard time sleeping, I’m so excited.”

That gave Loki a nervous, slightly sad smile that sat uneasily in Tony’s chest. “It’ll be fun,” Tony promised.

“Yes.”

“Do you want to hang out at the library?” Tony offered.

“I have some things I think I shall work on here,” Loki said gently. “I’ll see you at breakfast tomorrow?”

“That sounds good,” Tony said. He gave Loki one last hopeful smile before showing himself out.

Relieved, Tony started home with a skip in his step. He knew he’d have his work cut out convincing Loki that he wasn’t going to reject him the first time Loki didn’t sync up sexually with him. Tony couldn’t think of anyone whose sexuality and libido had synced up perfectly with his own anyway. It wasn’t practical, but Loki didn’t seem to know that.

More than anything, Tony couldn’t stop thinking about how tired and stressed Loki had looked, and the way he’d melted into his touch. Tony’s heart had started to ache where his anger had slipped away.

* * *

At breakfast, Loki was already seated when Tony got there. Tony took the open spot next to him.

He felt everyone’s eyes on them, but his attention was on Loki.

Loki had cut his hair. Instead of being past his shoulders, now it fell a couple inches above them. It was carefully straightened in a way that still looked imperfect enough that Tony knew it wasn’t a glamour. Loki was also wearing a slender, trendier outfit that Tony had only seen a few times before. “I like the new hairdo,” Tony said, reaching for an apple from the center of the table.

“It was time for a cut,” Loki said awkwardly.

They weren’t back to their usual rhythm yet. Tony piled up his plate with breakfast foods. “It looks good.”

“Thank you,” Loki said quietly. “I am going to arrange travel today.”

Tony nodded, then asked Thor about an upcoming sparring event to take the attention off them.

Miraculously, no one said anything to point out the fact that they were talking again. Loki left the table first, intending to speak to his mother to arrange permission to use the Bifrost to leave. Tony wasn’t at all surprised when Fandral and Hogun caught up with him at the end of the meal.

“So it looks as though the fight has ended,” Fandral said, smiling. “Do tell.”

Tony grinned at him. He’d rehearsed the answer. “We were kind of arguing over a magical theory on metals. I decided that our fight had gone on too long, and when we started talking again, we worked it out. He even offered to arrange so I could go to Svartalfheim as an apology. We’re going to go to the markets tomorrow. It kind of fits what we were arguing about, with magic and metal and all that. In fact, I might just prove that my theory is right when we visit,” Tony said with a

wink.

Hogun's face lit up. "I cannot think of a place that you would love more. The dwarves are some of the finest craftsman in the realms."

"I know!" Tony eagerly started talking about Svartalfheim and how dearly he'd wanted to visit. He was going to return with as many weapons and armor as he could carry.

* * *

Tony met Loki at the Bifrost the next morning. Loki was already standing there, his shoulders slightly hunched and tense. He wore his familiar black and green leathers, a formal design for traveling. Tony wasn't over the novelty of his shorter hair.

For his part, Tony had worn his usual travel attire, a fitted leather jacket and pants, with a pack. He wasn't kidding about wanting to purchase a lot. Tony'd put more time into his hair than normal though, and he was wearing a citrusy, spice scented cologne. He smiled at Loki in encouragement.

Loki's eyes lingered on his for a moment. Then he curtly turned to Heimdall, asking for passage through and confirming their return time.

They arrived just a little ways outside the market. Loki started walking in the direction of the noise of the crowd and the fluty music playing.

"You know," Tony said, catching up to him. "I am going to buy like half the market today."

Loki glanced over. After a moment he said, "Only half?"

Tony smiled. That was more like the Loki he knew. "Okay, maybe three fourths," Tony said.

"You should buy the swords that glow in darkness. They would sell well in your shop."

"Nah. Today's not about my shop," Tony said, stepping around a crate of eggs by the corner of a stall. "Besides, if I bring back a bunch of enchanted swords, people will start expecting me to have them in stock."

They walked into the busy crowd. No one's attention was particularly drawn towards them. "I really want to get some uru, though," Tony said.

Loki raised an eyebrow. "The best trait of uru is how it holds enchantments. What are you going to do with it?"

"Well, yeah, that's true," Tony said. "But it's also naturally more durable than other metals. Besides, Asgard charges an arm and a leg for it. Here it's less expensive. As far as expensive things go."

Loki hummed in acknowledgement. "I think I may purchase some new daggers for myself."

"That's a shock," Tony teased him.

Loki rolled his eyes. "As is your purchasing some metal to toy with."

Tony laughed. It felt so good to be teased by Loki again. He'd missed it.

They started stopping at the stalls, casually talking about the items. Loki became more like his usual self, chatting more easily. Sure enough, he purchased a new set of daggers with ornately engraved blades. Tony bought more metal than he could carry in his pack, and Loki soon offered to store everything in a pocket dimension that Tony couldn't stop asking questions about.

When they'd thoroughly exhausted the market, Tony suggested that they stop and have dinner before Heimdall brought them back.

When their meal was set out, Loki didn't eat right away. He brushed his finger against his mug, pensive. Tony had a mouthful of food when Loki spoke. "Did you find everything you sought today?" Tony nodded. "This was pleasant," Loki said, a hint of uncertainty in his voice.

Tony rushed to swallow. "Yeah," he said, reaching for his drink. Loki glanced at him. Tony took a long sip of his drink. "I had fun," Tony said. He set his glass down. "This was a good date."

Loki pursed his lips, then looked down at his food. He carefully cut apart a piece of meat.

"You don't think so?" Tony asked.

Loki looked up in surprise. "I do," he insisted. "I had fun."

Tony frowned at him. "But?"

Loki poked at the meat with his fork. "But today feels like something we already do."

Tony let out a little laugh. "I mean, yeah. What did you expect it to be like?" Loki slowly chewed the bite of meat. "Look, Lo. I love spending time with you. Us courting wouldn't mean that we have to make out halfway through the day or something."

Tony scratched at his hair. He'd been thinking about the hug, and things Loki might like but not get to enjoy often. "Though maybe it could mean that we cuddle when we get home today or something? It'd be nice to sit by the fire together with a glass of wine."

A faint, faint blush crept into Loki's cheeks as he drank, but Tony didn't miss it.

"Would you like that?" Tony asked. Loki nodded. "So that aside…maybe we could go on a second date?"

"Yes," Loki said, not quite able to hold his gaze.

"Awesome," Tony said.

Loki smiled, and though it was obvious he was still unsure, the quiet happiness there softened Tony's heart.

* * *

Tony tapped his spoon against his glass, standing up from the table. Loki rose beside him. Once their friends' attention was on them, Tony said, "We have an announcement that we'd like to make."

Loki stood taller, his eyes unusually bright. His hair had grown so that it barely brushed the top of his shoulders now, catching the light with an inky sheen. "Tony and I are officially courting," he said, with more pride in his voice than Tony had ever heard.

Immediately, Thor's proud cheer drowned everyone else's reactions out. Hogun handed Fandral a

fistful of coins as Fandral said, “You see? I *told you* there was more to it!”

But best of all, Loki turned to Tony with a bright smile, no longer quite so worried that Tony was going to leave in boredom or be disappointed, and Tony smiled back at him with warmth, immensely proud of Loki for sharing the news with everyone and to be standing there with him.

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